

APPENDIX 4

What's increasing the risk of sickness absence?



Are there any factors within your workplace environment that may be increasing the risk of staff becoming absent due to sickness.

Response Rates:

Directorate	Response
Administration, Democratic & Electoral Services	12
Adults & Health	39
Children's Services	47
Community Services	15
Culture, Leisure & Events	28
Economic Growth & Development	43
Finance & Business Services	35
HR, Legal & Communications	15
Xentrall Shared Services	9
Executive / Transformation	2
TOTAL	245

Key Themes:

The key themes from the comments have been collated below.

Theme	Number of comments
Service Reviews / Workload pressures / reduced staffing numbers	121
Infection Control	50
Heating & Ventilation in Offices	21
Lighting / Natural Light	16
Office cleanliness	9
Workstations / Office desks / chairs	8
Kitchen facilities	6
Line Management / Communication	15
Sick Pay / Attendance Management Process	18
Counselling Service	3
PPE / Work Clothing	1

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SELECTION OF COMMENTS BY THEME:

Service Reviews / Workload Pressures

"Due to job cuts there are fewer staff to do the same amount of work. This is leading to stress which could result in a higher sickness absence. It is important management are realistic and that the same level of service cannot be kept up with significantly fewer staff."

"After going through a review we have lost just under half of our team. This is now putting more pressure on the remaining team with more workload been given to remaining staff, this can cause a lot of stress and anxiety."

"I'm delighted to say that we are a resilient and supportive team and despite the very real uncertainty, anxiety and pressure relating to our review, we have not seen any change in attendance. So, I'd like to report that a supportive and warm team atmosphere promotes attendance!"

Infection Control

"Poor hygiene can lead to a number of staff being hit with sickness bugs and colds."

"Staff coming into work full of cold, simply because they are too afraid to take time off, thus spreading the cold in an open office environment."

"I'm not sure whether the council should consider a forced sickness policy when an employee attends work with cold or flu, as it is inevitable that they will pass on their illness to at least some colleagues. Perhaps working from home arrangements can be put in place to prevent the spread."

"The drive to use open plan offices where as many staff as possible are seated together in one room leads to a greater chance of colds and viruses being passed between a large number of people. We recently moved into open plan offices and the following month experienced a much higher number of people having to take sick leave because they had caught an infectious complaint (in this case the flu so the number of sick days was substantial) from colleagues. Whilst the open plan environment saves money on accommodation productivity can suffer and service delivery can be impaired."

"I often feel that people come into work with the flu or bug which is then passed around the office making others sick. I feel we should utilise the mobile working when people are still wanting to work whilst poorly."

Heating & Ventilation

"Office temperatures don't help and vary greatly from sweltering heat to wearing gloves at the computer."

"Certain areas of some buildings are extremely cold in winter, which could lead to increased risk of colds and flu."

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"Large overheated open plan offices which are becoming a breeding ground for germs. Once one person gets a cold and comes to work it goes round the whole 40-50 people in the office who all become ill to various degrees. Smaller offices would limit the spread."

"The workplace heating system, especially in the winter! the heating was usually on around early morning (we think it is around 7am) to warm the place up and then not sure when it will be turned on and the next time when we know that the heating is turned on is around 4pm. the office is cold all the time during winter, especially the old building."

Lighting / Natural Light

"The lighting in the office is awful. They are far too bright and cause lots of headaches and migraines."

"We have no windows, therefore no natural light, no ventilation resulting in increased headaches and migraines"

Office cleanliness

"Unsure of what the policy is for cleaning telephone handsets and computer keyboards again these office items can spread germs."

"There is dust all over the windowsills and around the skirting boards and I get extremely sniffly in a dusty environment."

Workstations / Office Desks & chairs

"Shaped desks that are not conducive to comfort when working = back, neck, everything pain."

"In the department I work in we have an issue with back/neck/arm problems due to incorrect and broken chairs and not sitting at desk correctly which eventually people are having assessments but this takes ages to do. We are often as well swapping desks and locations which can affect this."

Kitchen facilities

"The lack of soap at the kitchen sink does not encourage people to wash their hands properly before eating, etc. as the only alternatives are washing up liquid (if available, and purchased by staff)."

"Nowhere quite to go to for a break and sit on a comfortable chair to relax for a short while. There is one small kitchen with a table of 6 chairs (for everyone), which often results in me not having a break and eating at my desk. Kitchen is like Piccadilly Circus - noisy and stressful."

Line Management / Communication

"Make managers visibly accountable for improving sickness absence. Inflexible managers who do not support other alternatives to going sick. Lack of challenge when staff return to work."

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“Lack of communication between services, teams, management to staff and vice versa which makes it harder to do your job.”

Sick Pay / Attendance Management Policy

“Sickness monitoring procedures which often result in many members of staff coming into work with illness, resulting in further staff members being ill.”

“There’s no incentive not to be absent due to sickness. Would be nice to see a bonus for those of us who haven’t been off sick in a given year - at one time used to get a letter praising you for 100% attendance but even that must have stopped! You can’t help being ill but it seems that sickness records aren’t looked at when it comes to review/promotion opportunities so again it goes back to there’s no reason or incentive not to be absent.”

“Remove sick payment for first 3 days will significantly reduce short term absence.”

“I have always found that sickness in Local Authorities can be one of the highest and I believe this is due to the amount of sick pay entitlement. There will always be a minority of people who do take advantage of this.”

Counselling Service

“I personally don’t feel that our new counselling service is as good as previous provider having supported staff to access it and find that they speak once over the phone but then do not get offered additional support.”

PPE / Work Clothing

“We work out in the rain and after 4 hours the waterproofs are letting water through and then you go back put your stuff in dry room and it might not be on so the stuff is still wet and the water comes straight through”.